

**Addicts as Wounded Researchers: A JABR Study in Substance Use
and Recovery**

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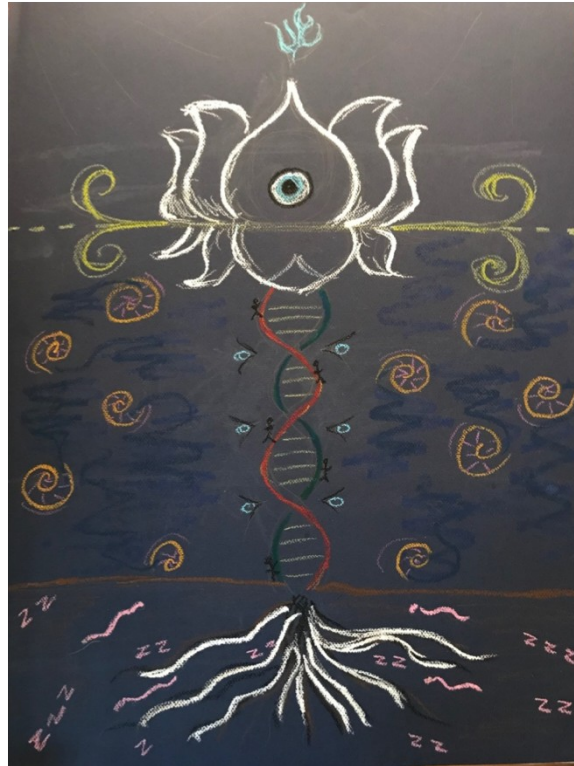


Figure 1. Evolvere, 2022

Since humans discovered they could consume external substances that would alter their feelings and perception, they have been engaging in a form of self-experimentation, discovering the different ways of seeing the world and what is possible within the mind. With overuse, however these substances start acting like tricksters on the mind and fool the brain chemistry into dependence. The user can become the addict, and then the

experiment becomes how much can he/she physically consume on a daily basis. Eventually the laws of the universe catch up and an intervention takes place and thus begins the long road of recovery. It is in this phase that the addict can take on the role of a wounded researcher, healing the splits caused by chemical dependence, reviewing and recovering what they left behind in their life prior to substance abuse. Using Jungian Arts Based Research (JABR) and drawing from my own experience I hope to explore the healing research potential of recovery of addiction and reveal an archetypal self-discovery that can emerge from overcoming substance dependence.

For this art project I went to the location where I was in treatment to see if I could tap into my own unconscious and the unconscious of the place. In going to the site of my wounding and healing I also hoped also to channel the wounded researcher. Romanyshyn writes “The wounded researcher is a complex witness who, by attending not only to the conscious but also unconscious subject factors in his or her research, seeks to transform a wound into a work.” (Romanyshyn, 2002, p. 145). In the atmosphere of my past addiction I was confronted with my complex, or independent obsessive psychic system of substance use. Therefore, my work in revisiting the location where I attended rehabilitation was to embrace the wound and transform it into art with the process of Jungian Arts Based Research.

For this JABR experiment I purposely had little conscious intervention so I didn’t intentionally incorporate any Jungian concepts, rather I discerned them retroactively. Upon reflection the concept that figured most

strongly was the myth and symbol of Medusa's eye. Also appearing was the shadow, or the hidden inferior side of consciousness that a person struggles to accept which is shown in the rooted underground of mud filled with worms from which the lotus flower emerges in the final artwork. Finally, the integration of shadow content from the decomposition from the worms and into the lotus reflects the Jungian concept of individuation wherein one's unconscious becomes conscious "in a perpetual state of making and unmaking." (Rowland, 2021, p.8) and one differentiates into one's fullest potential self.

To give more context to this project, in JABR the process of doing the art is the research. The types of JABR include analytic, synthetic, critical-activist and improvisatory (Rowland, 2021). The form of art I am attempting is improvisatory, as I took one day to channel the unconscious memories from my time in rehab. In improvisatory art there is a "commitment to an unknown destination before the artist begins" (Rowland, 2021, p. 19). Therefore, the aim of this art project was to engage in an improvised exploration into my first experience of recovery with no clear idea of where the unconscious would take me. I found this difficult because as the artist I had to let the creative mind and scientific mind work simultaneously to arrive at an unexpected destination. The process felt like giving birth to what my mind was reaching to grasp and in this contact with what was formerly ungraspable I discovered something new.

To describe this process of improvisatory Jungian Arts Based Research with a lens of the wounded researcher, I began the sketch with the wound of addiction in mind but without the idea of what shape recovery would take. I wanted to relive the surrender I felt when entering treatment but then also illustrate the transformation and attitude of rebuilding in recovery. While I was in treatment the house where I stayed was called “Lotus”, so that symbol became the focus of the research to channel the experience of living there again. I was curious as to whether getting my head above water like the lotus, or overcoming alcoholism would manifest through.

The first obstacle I came across was that of perfectionism in the art making process, and an attachment to outcome which runs counter to the improvisational modality of art making. My critical self kept saying, you’re just doodling! This isn’t art! I had imposter syndrome in being a creator in my own world. I felt like I was a struggling translator of my own experience. What helped me overcome the feeling of perfectionism was believing that the act of research was art as a service versus art for myself. I was the one making decisions but it was for a healing goal of channeling my experience from Alta Mira. I tried to let the memories of healing flow as a channel to the unconscious.

Drawing on the floor, I felt the weight of my past experience become the authority of decision making in the art. The idea that “the cure ought to grow naturally out of the patient himself.” (Jung and Jaffe, 1998, p. 131)

was apt here. I used pencil initially so I was allowed mistakes. First, I divided the paper into thirds. The lotus started at the bottom but then I had to redo this and put it at the top since the subterranean aspects wanted to be included, hence the concept of the shadow coming through. Spacing and placement was important in this process. It was surprising how much balancing played a role, especially in the depiction of layers of consciousness. As in our brain the more unconscious elements exist lower in our brainstem while the conscious cortex is at the top, I was moved to show the recovery of the upper through embracing the lower.

The stem of the lotus then became DNA. Here I experienced how the psyche “mixes unlike entities as it demands that such images be treated as meaningful and *their* energy, their independent being, be trusted” (Rowland, 2021, p. 18). The genes brought with them the message that I must overcome myself. I felt the idea that wholeness is letting one’s genes be the union of opposites and not getting caught in another saturnian spiral. Then I drew roots and mud. I had my outline.

As more symbols started manifesting, the question remained where to place them and again I had to let my memories guide the way. Stick figures began walking up and down the ladder of DNA as we did at Alta Mira. We broke free from our roots when we rose in the morning and walked up our own DNA chains in self-recovery. Most notably a Medusa eye emerged in the lotus, an apotropaic or preventative symbol that keeps evil away. I saw swirls in the water beneath the lotus, eddies of distraction leading to one-

sidedness, half medusa eyes looking astray. Worms manifested- the worms came out at night and we saw them on the pathway in the morning while I was in treatment. In some ways the worms symbolized the natural decomposition of the old dying habits in addiction taking place while creating nutrients for further spiritual growth. This resonated with the Jungian theme of individuation as through the decomposition and reconstruction one could “creatively integrate more and more unruly energies that appear from the unknown psyche” (Rowland, 2021, p.8).

Now on to the process of adding color to the work. I began with the pastels, and realized how important the background color was. The navy-blue colored paper was what was available so I took it as a sign from the collective unconscious that this color was a necessary backdrop. The charged nocturnal feel to the navy blue makes the background conducive to portraying unconscious activity. With navy blue as the musical “key” that the song of this piece is in, choosing colors felt like choosing notes to play on the piano but the end effect was visible all at once. I had to figure out which colors not to use so the psyche could fill the space. I also wanted the shadow to be present in the work, so I kept in mind the space where there is no color as areas opposing consciousness.

Oil pastel colors felt like my own legato thought-notes on the paper. Doubling up the colors of oil pastels encouraged a both/and perspective. Blue fire emerged. Orange spirals felt like being caught in Jupiter trap of expansion. This brought the idea that one can be of great service bringing

an end to the never-ending expansion of addiction. Red eros love and green logos logic wove through the double helix as the walk we had to take walking up to the lotus. One half genes from mom, one half from dad, we walk with both feet up the ladder to recovery. The red of the eros helix strand also suggests we must fall in love with our lives again if we want to heal from addiction. But this love must intertwine with the green of logos to exist practically in the world upon reentry in recovery.

Because this was an improvisatory art, I chose to leave it incomplete. Everything I needed to share was contained in that one-day visit. Thus, I wanted to do a sort of opposite action from the scientific method and leave much to be known, especially since I included the scientific paradigm of the double helix. The unconscious worked through me during this time, and the “existence of the unconscious means that all other knowledge is incomplete (Rowland, 2021, p.14). This is also reflected in the fact that the work of recovery is never complete. Whether it is attending meetings continually through Alcoholics Anonymous, working with a sponsor or attending rehabilitation tune ups, the work is truly ongoing. Recovery is about changing these engrained patterns in the unconscious and it takes sustained engagement and maintenance over time and is never wholly finished.

I learned a lot from this process of making Jungian art out of my wound of addiction. First I will examine what the art knows that I didn’t know before I began this project of channeling my experience as an addict

in recovery. When I look back at the art, I see an interplay between timelessness of genes and transcendence of the combination of medusa eye and lotus in terms of substance use. The myth of Medusa could be reflected in the addict with the head full of snakes (as addicts heads are full of drugs), with the wound of exclusion from society. An addict can recover into new life, like a Medusa head post-decapitation or post-addictive ego death, as a lotus emerges from the mud with an all-seeing eye that can ward off evil. This work of my wounded-researcher could be seen as an attempt to heal the story of Medusa, a recovery post-decapitation. When you slay Medusa you get Pegasus, or winged-spiritual transcendence that resonates with the transcendent symbolism of the lotus. It also contains the idea that one can only keep away evil if one's grown from it, as shown by the eye in the lotus. "A man who has not passed through the inferno of his passions has never overcome them"(Jung and Jaffe, 1989, p. 277).

There is also a transcending of history through rising with one's DNA. Through disciplined inner work one can obtain one's own watchful eye with the capacity to keep evil away. This image of the lotus coupled with the union of opposites is described in *Dreams, a Portal to Source* by Whitmont and Perera, who recount, " In Eastern lore the corresponding image of the Jewel in the Lotus, the om mani padme um, points to the union of Yang and Yin, the unfathomable union beyond the worldly opposites, which is the path and goal of spiritual development" (Whitmont and Perrera, 1989, p. 52). This transcendence can only emerge if one stays rooted in the shadow in the

unconscious, or the mud. Through embracing the union of opposites of one's own identity and DNA in recovery one can transform from the mud of the addiction into the spiritual awakening of the lotus.

Looking forward to how this channeled art fits into changes in the collective consciousness, in the twenty first century there is a need for collective catharsis and healing from our escapist, dissociated and over-consuming society. Medusa's head can be found in all the ways we are addicted to the internet and other products of modernity. Here recovering addicts can be profound agents of healing and change in their recovery and for others still struggling with their own unconscious addictions. Through sharing their stories in Alcoholics Anonymous and sponsoring struggling newcomers, recovering addicts can promote the self-discovery in all that are on the journey of recovery and in the world at large.

Bringing together the process of channeling the wounded researcher and the lessons from my personal improvisatory Jungian art I discovered how in recovering their past selves addicts can recover the apotropaic or preventative, mythological eye of Medusa which can in turn help heal others as they share their experiences as wounded researchers. I also uncovered how Jungian ideas such as the shadow and individuation can translate through this wound of unconscious addiction in the art making process. And though not every addict is going to become an artist, the work of creating a new life in recovery is an art in itself.

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